

15112

The UNIVERSITY of SOUTHAMPTON as a WAR HOSPITAL

Norman Gardiner



**The University of Southampton as a First
World War hospital and the local area
during the same period.**

£1.30



Sir Sidney Kimber with his Chaplain, Canon R.A. Mitchell, at the thanksgiving service at St. Mary's Church 1918.

Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Geoffrey Hampson of Southampton University for his valuable help and advice especially with regard to the text.

Of the illustrations, my grateful thanks are due to Miss Doris Kimber for the photographs of her fathers brickyard and for that of his house, "Oakdene". To H.H. Meachin, C.K. Saunders, Mrs. M. Preston, Geoffrey Gardiner and Mr. G. Hampson for the aerial view and the facsimile from the Army Council. Other photographs are from the Author's collection.

©Norman Gardiner

June 1983



Front Cover:

Southampton University War Hospital 1915.

Published by: Kingfisher Railway Productions, PO Box 8,
Southampton. SO9 7AJ

The UNIVERSITY of SOUTHAMPTON as a WAR HOSPITAL

The Story of the University as a Military Hospital during the 1914/18 War has long been waiting to be written, and I hope this small effort may go a little way to put on record the distinguished and humanitarian part played by all who strived within its walls during the darkest days of the First-War years.



Nurses and patients with Father Christmas in 1917.

On the 20th May 1914, the new building of the University College (as it was then) was formally opened by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Haldane. But before the Staff and Students from the old Hartley College in the High Street, Southampton, could finally occupy the new premises, the First World War was declared. The buildings were taken over by the War Department as a Military Hospital, under the command of Col. R.E. Lauder, at that time Medical Officer of Health for Southampton, and staffed by Nurses from the British Red Cross Society, whose quarters were in a building (now demolished) opposite, on the other side of University Road. A brick building (also now demolished) was built in front of what is now the Edward Turner Sims Library facing University Road, for the caretaker of the hospital, one, Charlie Taylor.

Casualties from France and Belgium, and other theatres of war, began to arrive so quickly and in ever increasing numbers that the main building of the hospital was quite unable to cope with the wounded being received every day, and it became necessary for many large wooden huts to be erected at the rear of the main hospital to serve as additional wards. The carnage continued as the battles raged on the Somme, and at Vimy Ridge and Hill 60, which was reflected in the terrible wounds, disfigurements and broken bodies, that were being brought into the wards as each day went by, deaths, too, began to increase to such an extent, that it necessitated the building of a mortuary, on the north side of the hospital occupying a site of the present Biological Building, where it became a regular sight for passers by in University Road to see coffins being unloaded and taken inside. Military Gun Carriage funerals too were often seen passing along University Road into Burgess Street, (as it was then called) on their way to a local cemetery.

Being at school in those days, I paid frequent visits to the hospital, with a school friend, taking cigarettes, fruit and sweets to some of the less badly wounded, many of them from the battles mentioned above. One of these soldiers in particular remains fixed in my mind, by the name of Nicholls, a Private in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry



Col. R.E. Lauder Commanding Officer and nurses.



Hut 16 ward, Christmas 1917.



Hut 8 ward, 1918.

who was very badly wounded in the legs during the early part of the war in a battle near Namur, in Belgium, who with others we visited, was in Ward 15 Upper South, upstairs in the southern wing of the main hospital. This soldier was a bit of a mystery to us, as we were unable to find out much about him, or what he did in civil life, but he was indeed a character, and could use his hands with great dexterity, especially in doing card tricks in the manner of a magician, and believe it or not, could play the tune of "God Save The King" on his teeth, having these accomplishments, gave us the idea, that at some time or other during his life, he must have been on the stage, or perhaps in a circus. Whilst in the hospital he also wrote a poem concerning a railway accident to the Bristol night express from Crewe, in which he was involved. I have a copy of this interesting bit of verse, still amongst my "treasures".



Nurses and patients outside the main building in 1917.

Unfortunately we never knew what happened to Private Nicholls, the other wounded in that ward, or indeed to any of the others in the hospital, as our visits came to an abrupt end, when all the patients, were, without any previous warning, suddenly transferred to Netley Hospital, to make room (it was learned later) for some hundreds of troops arriving in the "Aquitania" from The Dardanelles, all of whom were suffering from an illness, the type of which, so far as I can recall, was never disclosed, but it was stated that the death roll was high. When these soldiers reached the hospital, the only visitors allowed, were wives, parents and very near relatives, who from time to time were urgently sent for, when a patient was found to be dangerously ill, or in fact dying. Many of these relatives came from all parts of the country, some being put up for the night by a kind friend of mine in University Road, who gave of her best to help and comfort these sad people in their distress.

And so for many months more the slaughter went on, as day and night troops and transport (mostly then horse-drawn) moved up to the line to carry on the great fight for freedom. Finally, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918 the guns at last fell silent, and the human massacre and bloodshed ceased, and the war, which we were told was "the War to end all Wars", was over, and peace returned to a shattered world.

So too, in due course the University finished its noble task, when in 1919 the buildings were released by the War Department, and the staff and students could begin their work after the long interruption. The wooden huts used as additional wards to the hospital, were refurnished, and for some years, used for student training, until they were finally demolished to make way for the permanent brick buildings which stand in their place to-day.



Nurses and staff outside the main building.



Sir Sidney and his dog at his residence "Oakdene" in Welbeck Avenue (now demolished).

In 1914, when the University was taken over by the War Department as a Military Hospital, it virtually stood in an oasis of green fields, bounded on the north by Burgess Street, as it then was known, on the south by Welbeck Avenue, and on the west by what was then Back Lane (now University Rd). But before coming to the general itinerary of the neighbourhood at that time, it may be well to recall memories of some of the notable and interesting personalities who made their mark, not only locally but in the City of Southampton. Starting then, on the south side of Welbeck Avenue, the most outstanding must surely have been Mr. (later Sir Sidney) Kimber, twice Mayor of Southampton, whose name will always be associated with the building of the Civic Centre, and with his foresight, drive and determination in acquiring the land at Bassett (then part of Fray's Farm) for what is now the Southampton Sports Centre. Sir Sidney lived at "Oakdene" a large house at the top of Welbeck Avenue (now a block of Flats, some of which are occupied by university students) where he died in 1949.

In "Tower House", a little lower down, which is still standing, lived Mr. Horace Kelway Pope, the well known and respected Solicitor, and Borough Coroner, whose Firm, Coxwell & Pope, carried on their practice at the bottom of the High Street, in what was then, Gloucester Square. It was during his Office as Borough Coroner, that Mr Pope had a serious altercation with the notorious Horatio Bottomley, which rumbled on for some time, concerning what he considered a defamatory article written by Bottomley, in his paper "John Bull" criticising a verdict given by Mr. Pope at a

Southampton Inquest. Much later "Tower House" was occupied by rather an eccentric character by the name of Frederick Beaton, who carried on the business of a sailmaker, at a shop near the Itchen Floating Bridge, he was also somewhat of an artist, and displayed his pictures there for the public to view. His main philosophy, which he expounded to all and sundry, was that all life on this planet was derived from the sun. During the early part of the 1914/18 War, "Tower House" was the home of a number of Belgium Refugees, one of whom became a Southampton tram driver until he was eventually repatriated.



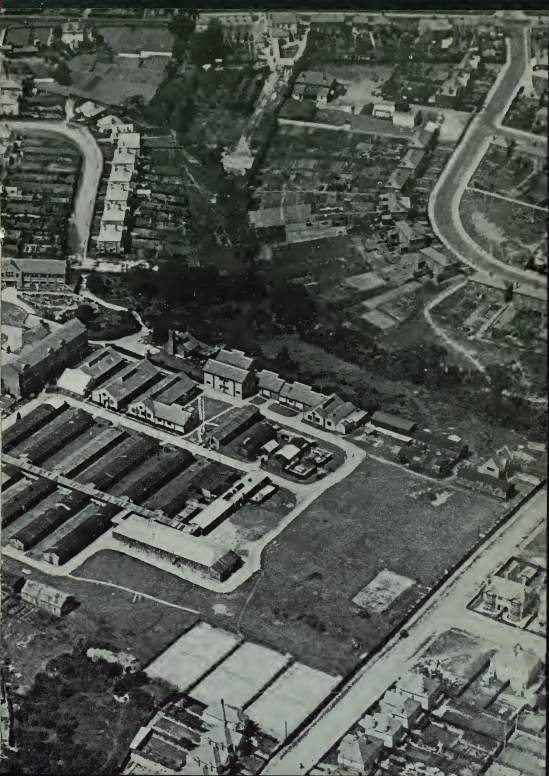
Belgian refugees at Tower House, Welbeck Avenue, Highfield in 1915.

Other residents on that side of the road who spring to mind, were George Dibben a member of the well-known Southampton firm of William Dibben, H.R. Gater of Hewitt & Gater, Auctioneers & Estate Agents, and Harry Groves, a Builder. On the north side of Welbeck Avenue, lived B.H. Waller of Messrs Waller & King, Auctioneers and Estate Agents, and the Rev. Jellicoe, a relative of the famous Admiral Jellicoe of the Battle of Jutland fame.

It must be difficult, nay almost impossible, for the present generation to visualise the general aspect surrounding the immediate vicinity of the University War Hospital as it was, before and including the War years. University Road, as it is now known, was only a lane, and in fact was locally called "Back Lane". Starting then, on the west side from the top of Church Lane, or Highfield Hill, were a row of houses (still there), in one of which, before moving to Welbeck Avenue lived Sidney (later Sir Sidney) Kimber. Rather larger semi detached or detached houses followed, further along still, was a house, which is still there, occupied by a well known local policeman, namely P.C.

Aerial view of the hut wards in the late 1920's before demolition.





Froud, a large well built man, who stood no nonsense from the youngsters around at the time, in fact he was not adverse to giving them a clip round the ear if they were badly misbehaving in any way! P.C. Froud's daughter is still living in Highfield. In another house nearby, lived a rather eccentric school mistress, Miss Burnett, who some of the older inhabitants will remember. Between this house and another row of houses terminating at Salisbury Road was a large area of grassland, the childrens' playground, known as "The Green", which, at the start of the 1914/18 War was used as a training ground for soldiers from the Remount Depot at Swaythling, where they were taught to ride by a vile Sergt. Major Instructor, who often aroused the indignation of a lady living nearby giving him a very strong piece of her mind, which perhaps did not help, as he took it out more than ever on the trainee soldiers! Ironically, this same Sergt. Major was suffocated to death, when the Hut in which he was sleeping at the Remount Camp, was filled with fumes from a Stove, it was said that he had few mourners!!

Crossing Salisbury Road, we come to yet another row of houses (which are still there) known as "Highfield Grove" terminating at "The Stile Inn". In one of these lived the late George Brown, the famous all round Hampshire and England Cricketer, who I recall seeing at the Southampton County Cricket Ground, break his bat whilst playing against Armstrong's Australian test cricket team in the early twenties. Also a resident in Highfield Grove, at that time, was one of the mounted police who patrolled the Common, another that scared the youngsters, but whose name escapes me.

From Highfield Grove, we turn into the north side of Salisbury Road, which for many years, only had houses on that side, built by a Mr. Broomfield, who named each



Highfield Grove from the corner of Salisbury Road to the "Stile Inn" pre 1914.

terrace after one of his children, and who often could be seen asleep with his dog over on "The Green" opposite. Mention must be made of some of Broomfield's tenants, particularly, perhaps of the Squires family, who, in 1914, lost two of their sons, one being Ernest, who was killed in France, and the other, Bill Squires, who died while serving in India. A daughter, Amy, after the War, married an Australian soldier, who she met while he was a patient in "Elmsleigh" Red Cross Hospital, a house taken over as a hospital in Glen Eyre Road (now demolished, and now "Elmsleigh Gardens"). Incidentally, one of the Nurses at "Elmsleigh" was Miss Ruth Mitchell, the daughter of Canon R.A. Mitchell the Vicar of Highfield at that time. Amy Squires eventually emigrated with her husband to Australia, but returned home once on a visit, some years afterwards, before her parents died. Then towards the end of the road were the Pook family, one of whose daughters, Norah Pook, is now the Wife of H.H. Meachen the well-known local lecturer, City Guide, and ex-Special Police Inspector. The south side of Salisbury Road, save for the Post Office on the corner of University Road, (the earliest occupants being the Misses McKay) was an open field, "The Green" mentioned earlier, until about 1908, when a Mr. Harry Groves, earlier mentioned as living in Welbeck Avenue, but then living in University Road, built the first row of houses on that side adjacent to the Post Office, known as "Cranbourne Terrace". It was said that these houses were built for the sum of £200! The first also comprised a brick laundry (part of which still stands) managed by Mr. Alfred Pope and his wife, who employed a number of local women in their Laundry. Alfred Pope, one of the most easy-going of men, was a familiar figure pushing his Laundry cart, delivering laundered articles, to his customers around the district. His only daughter, Dolly, now Mrs. Mudge, still occupies her parents old home, but the laundry business ceased on their death. Later, when Groves was in a better financial position, resulting from the sale of the "Cranbourne Terrace" houses, he was able to improve on the other houses he built at the end of the road, the last of which was occupied by Harry and Edwin Newman two brothers, who were respectively, the Manager of the Shirley Tram Depot in Carlisle Road, and Chief Overhead Linesman. Both of these brothers were members of the Newman family, who for so many years worked in some capacity for the Southampton Corporation Transport.

Between the two rows of houses built by Harry Groves, was a semi detached house (now demolished) erected by a Mr. Jordan, who lived with his family at Church Farm, in University Road, (also demolished). In one of these lived Mr. Jack Carter and his family (for whom the house was built) who was a Sergt. Major, and served in Tibet, in the Younghusband Campaign, and later in India and Orkney, receiving the D.S.O. during such service. From Salisbury Road Jack Carter and his family moved to West End Road, where he was the only survivor when their bungalow received a direct hit in the big raid on Southampton on the night of November 23rd 1940. Before leaving Salisbury Road, I must mention that during the 1914/18 War, the Post Office mentioned above, was occupied by Arthur S. Young, also a local Photographer, who took some of the photos illustrating this Story.

We must return now to "The Green" which was bounded on the north by Salisbury Road and overlooked Kimber's well-known Brickyard owned and managed by Sir Sidney Kimber, which extended over a large area with Southampton Common on its west side. A stream, which still flows through the ornamental gardens of the





Agricultural land at Highfield prior to the brickyard.



Sir Sidney Kimber's Highfield brickyard in 1914.

University, then fed into the Brickyard pond, where, during school holidays, fishing for lizards went on. The entire area of the old brickyard now forms part of the University on the western side of University Road comprising The Refectory, Students Union, and the Geological, Biological and Physics Departments, which, quoting the late Miss Elsie Sandell, "have altered the Skyline, as they rise upwards in many stories, to accommodate the ever increasing number of Students".



The same scene today with university buildings covering the site.

Further to the north, is the new John Hansard Gallery, and the Turner Sims Concert Hall. Crossing Salisbury Road again, we return to the east side of University Road, to the corner of Burgess Street, as it was then, where stood a large white house with an extensive garden, known as "Boundary Hall", the residence of Dr. James Bradley, Fleet Surgeon, R.N. Retired, and in his large garden stood a very high poplar tree, a district landmark. After the death of Dr. Bradley, and subsequent owners, "Boundary Hall" was eventually demolished, and is now the site of the Southampton University Oceanography Department. From there to the University were more fields which belonged to a farmer with only one arm, who we had to keep an eye on if we were seen playing there.

Where the University now stands was a Rifle Range, owned by the Southampton Miniature Rifle Club, which, when the University was about to be built, was moved over to the far end of the brickyard, where a Red Flag was flown indicating firing was in progress. In mentioning the other side of the road, I am reminded that the Nuffield

Theatre, now stands on part of "The Green" which has been so often mentioned in relation to this Story. Next to the University, on its south side, stood a picturesque house and garden, known as Church Farm, where lived the builder Mr. George E. Jordan, (mentioned earlier) and his family, whose daughter was a local school teacher. This house was pulled down to make way for the present University Book Shop.

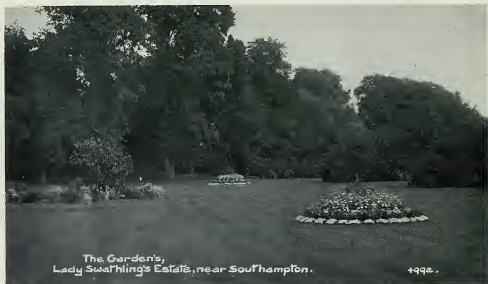
Then came more fields to the corner of Welbeck Avenue, where this part of my story ends, as it began, at the top of Church Lane, and Highfield Hill, looking down, as it does, on to Highfield Church, where Canon R.A. Mitchell (later Dean of Lincoln) was the Vicar, and Mayor's Chaplain. On to Highfield School, (still there) Mr. A.T. Flux, the then Headmaster, the Fathers of his Pupils, and later perhaps, some of the Pupils themselves, would be among the Flower of British Manhood to perish on the Battlefields of France and Flanders, and who now lie "in some corner of a Foreign Field, that is for ever England".

But before however putting "Finis" to this University Saga, perhaps it would be fitting to try and remember the scene at the various parts of the City before being taken over by the University as additional faculties and buildings to further its advancement. First then the Hostel at South Stoneham House. This grand old Mansion, and



South Stoneham House, residence of Lord and Lady Swaythling. Pre 1914.

extensive gardens, was the residence of Lord and Lady Swaythling, where annually, the Southampton Royal Horticultural Show was held, a very popular event in those days, which included the Netting of the Salmon Pool, a very great attraction, followed in the evening by Dancing on the spacious Lawn. Then to Bassett where there are more hostels in the extensive grounds of the late Mr. J.R. Anderson, noted for his vast



The gardens of South Stoneham, pre 1914.



South Stoneham House, now a residence for students.



Netting the salmon in South Stoneham House gardens, pre 1914.

collection of exotic plants brought from many parts of the World. At the top of Glen Eyre Road, the other hostel, was originally the residence of the Bishop of Southampton, The Right Reverend, James McArthur, whose daughter's wedding was a great occasion locally, when Burgess Street (as it was then) was decorated with flags and bunting for the bride when she was driven to church in a carriage drawn by a pair of greys.

Now we come to the Medical Block in Burgess Road standing on the site of three large houses, "Boldrewood", the residence of Walter Neale, "Arlington Lodge" by a coincidence then occupied by Kenneth H. Vickers, Principal of the University College, and "Beechcroft", owned by Charles Batten. The Medical Block also took in a house and garden in Bassett Crescent East "Bassett Rise" (which is still there) originally the residence of the Misses Way, very well known and respected in the district at that time. So finally up to "Chilworth Manor", now occupied by University students, which was formerly the residence of John Arthur Willis Fleming ("Squire Fleming" as he was kindly known by all in the Village) a member of the noted Fleming family of landowners, one of whom in the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First, was Lord Chief Justice of England, who died suddenly at Stoneham House (now demolished) in 1613, and who is buried in North Stoneham Church. His tomb shows him in his Robes of Office, with his Wife and eight children in effigy, kneeling below, his Epitaph—"A man of great virtue, copied by all, but excelled by none!"

Thus ends my story of the University War Hospital its surrounding and premises. A story based largely from memory going back very many years, and from pictorial evidence. Memory, however, is a fickle jade, and at times can be very inaccurate, though I'm hoping that mine has not suffered in this way to any large extent.



Southampton University War Hospital. The same spot today.

Back cover,

Facsimile of notice of thanks to the University from the Army Council for use of the building as a military hospital - 1914-1919.



DURING THE GREAT WAR

OF 1914-1919 THIS BUILDING WAS ESTABLISHED AND MAINTAINED AS A HOSPITAL FOR BRITISH SICK AND WOUNDED: THE ARMY COUNCIL, IN THE NAME OF THE NATION THANK THOSE WHO HAVE RENDERED TO IT THIS VALUABLE AND PATRIOTIC ASSISTANCE IN THE HOUR OF ITS EMERGENCY AND THEY DESIRE ALSO TO EXPRESS THEIR DEEP APPRECIATION OF THE WHOLE-HEARTED ATTENTION WHICH THE STAFF OF THIS HOSPITAL GAVE TO THE PATIENTS WHO WERE UNDER THEIR CARE: THE WAR HAS ONCE AGAIN CALLED UPON THE DEVOTION AND SELF-SACRIFICE OF BRITISH MEN AND WOMEN AND THE NATION WILL REMEMBER WITH PRIDE AND GRATITUDE THEIR WILLING AND INESTIMABLE SERVICE